

To: R8 GKM Leadership Team[R8_GKM_LeadershipTeam@epa.gov]; Grantham, Nancy[Grantham.Nancy@epa.gov]; Deitz, Randy[Deitz.Randy@epa.gov]; Cohen, Nancy[Cohen.Nancy@epa.gov]; Glikes, Michael[Glikes.Michael@epa.gov]
From: StClair, Christie
Sent: Fri 2/12/2016 10:03:05 PM
Subject: GKM clips: Deseret News, AP, Daily Caller

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1. Deseret News: EPA didn't clue in Utah on San Juan River contamination
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Deseret News: EPA didn't clue in Utah on San Juan River contamination

<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865647572/State-EPA-didnt-clue-in-Utah-on-San-Juan-River-contamination.html?pg=all>

Amy Joi O'Donoghue

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah water quality regulators stumbled upon new information gathered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that shows elevated metal concentrations in the San Juan River, a revelation that will prompt new rounds of testing by state scientists.

The federal agency had not directly disclosed the results to the Utah Department of Environmental Quality from September and October sampling in the wake of the Gold King Mine spill last August. Instead, state employees discovered the information in a posting on the EPA's website.

"It is a concern," Alan Matheson, the department's director, said Friday. "If there is something that raises a red flag, we would hope that we would be notified. We would hope we would find out other than through our own search."

The samples show elevated metal concentrations that exceed state water quality standards, but Matheson said the data do not indicate an immediate public health threat.

"We looked at the numbers and shared them with other agencies and concluded there is no immediate threat to public health or agriculture," Matheson said, adding that testing showed the concentrations of metals were episodic and may have been triggered by storm events that stirred river sediment.

Still, Matheson said the results are concerning enough to prompt a three-pronged approach by the state agency to gather additional information and put a long-term monitoring plan in place.

"We are going to take three initial actions to ensure the safety of Utah residents," Matheson said. "First, we filed a Freedom of Information request to gather whatever additional information EPA has on their sampling and we are immediately undertaking our own sampling regime to see if there is ongoing evidence of elevated metals in the San Juan River."

The department is also working with the EPA, tribes and other states to determine the extent and source of contamination. It has posted information gathered so far on its website.

The August spill at the Gold King Mine in Colorado sent 3 million gallons of mustard-colored metal-laden sludge into the Animus River, a 126-mile river which is a tributary of the San Juan River. The rivers are part of the Colorado River system, eventually dumping into Lake Powell.

Lingering metals such as cadmium, arsenic, lead and zinc pose future risks that cannot yet be quantified, and Matheson said it's difficult to tell exactly how and when they made it into the rivers.

"There have been releases of metal-laden water from mining for decades," he said. "It could be from the Gold King Mine or legacy mining or other sources that have not been identified yet."

The Colorado spill above Silverton has evoked a blistering response from local, state and congressional leaders, with the federal agency revealing last week that 880,000 pounds of heavy metals were released into critical waterways as the result of an intentional breach of the mine's plug directed by EPA.

On Thursday, the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources released a Majority Staff Report on the spill that asserts a series of blunders on the part of the agency and deliberate concealment of key information related to technical evaluations of the mine's structure and integrity.

"When government actions result in harm, it's our duty to know who was responsible and why decisions failed. They haven't been forthcoming in this regard," said Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah and the committee chairman.

Matheson said it is unclear at this point how long — and to what extent — the state will have to monitor the San Juan River.

"Our mission is to protect the health and safety of Utah residents and the environment," he said. "We take that seriously. We are going to take a very cautious approach and make sure we get the best information available to ensure that our residents are not being exposed to harmful levels of metals."

AP

EPA knew mine spill was possible

<http://www.kob.com/article/stories/s4046672.shtml#.Vr5U9PkrJxA>

Matt Brown and Dan Elliott

Created: 02/12/2016 12:30 PM

DENVER (AP) - A probe of a mine waste accident in Colorado that fouled rivers in three states with arsenic, lead and other toxic substances has found further evidence that government workers knew a spill from the gold mine was possible, according to documents released Thursday by a U.S. House committee.

Hays Griswold, a U.S. Environmental Protection agency official in charge of the Gold King mine at the time of the August accident, said in an email that he "personally knew" the plugged, inactive mine could contain large volumes of water.

The email was sent Oct. 28 to other EPA officials and provided Thursday to The Associated Press by the House Natural Resources Committee as it released the findings of its Republican-led probe.

An EPA cleanup crew triggered the spill during excavation work at the mine's entrance, unleashing a 3-million-gallon deluge that contaminated rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.

The release dumped more than 880,000 pounds of heavy metals into Colorado's Animas River, forcing the closure of downstream public water systems until the plume passed and raising concerns about long-term environmental impacts.

"I personally knew it could be holding back a lot of water, and I believe the others in the group knew as well," Griswold wrote in the email.

EPA officials did not immediately respond to questions from the AP about the email.

The spill occurred when workers for EPA and its contractor, Environmental Restoration LLC, started excavation work that was intended to allow them to safely drain the mine.

An Interior Department investigation pinned responsibility on the EPA for not checking to see if the mine held pressurized water. EPA officials previously said the workers on site determined there was no or low pressure from water backed up inside the mine.

Griswold indicated in the email that the determination of low water pressure was based on mistaken assumptions about the location of the top of the mine's buried entrance, known in mining as the brow.

The excavation work was intended to clear away debris for the entrance before the mine was to be drained at a later date, he wrote.

"We and or I particularly thought we were four or maybe five feet above the brow," Griswold wrote. "However, as it turned out we inadvertently got to probably within a foot or two of the brow. That proved to be too close when rock at the exposed face crumbled out, providing an outlet for the water."

The Daily Caller

Flint Gets Millions, While Gold King Mine Victims Are Ignored

<http://dailycaller.com/2016/02/12/flint-gets-millions-while-gold-king-mine-victims-are-ignored/>

Ethan Barton – 2/12/16 – 2:23pm

A Native American community that was devastated by a flood of poisoned water released in a man-made pollution crisis is still waiting for compensation from the responsible agency — months after the disaster happened.

But that community isn't Flint, Mich., where President Barack Obama pledged \$80 million in assistance after local, state and federal missteps and inaction caused lead poisoning in an unknown number of homes' water supplies.

It's the Navajo Nation that still waits for reimbursement after the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) poisoned its drinking water in a disastrous incident at Colorado's Gold King Mine in August 2015. An EPA contractor doing the agency's bidding caused a spill that poisoned the Animas River with three million gallons of toxic waste, turning the river and its tributaries yellow in three states.

"It caused hundreds, maybe thousands of farmers to lose their crops and have their crops affected last season," Navajo Nation President Spokesman Mihio Manus told The Daily Caller News Foundation.

"It affected the livelihood of these farmers," Manus said. "A lot of farmers lost a lot of money."

Manus explained many customers were skeptical about buying produce from Navajo farmers — who irrigate their crops with water from the San Juan River, which is fed by the Animas River.

"We are still moving forward with establishing reimbursement and funds to be distributed to the farmers, and we are still addressing the issue of how many contaminants have settled into the river bed," Manus said.

Many Navajo farmers are concerned the San Juan River remains toxic and are avoiding its use, though the EPA declared the water is safe, according to Manus.

New Mexico's environmental agency recently found "levels of contamination that came close to those immediately after the spill" after heavy rains stirred San Juan River's sediment, Indian Country Today Media Network reported Friday.

Meanwhile, the Federal Emergency Management Agency declined the Navajo Nation's funding requests.

The feds recently began a multi-agency criminal investigation into the Flint crisis. Yet, the Gold King Mine disaster is not the focus of a federal criminal investigation — though House Committee on Natural Resources Republicans recently reported that the EPA violated two federal laws in the incident.

It's likely that many details regarding the mine's blowout will remain secret without a criminal investigation, TheDCNF previously reported.

TheDCNF has reported extensively on the striking differences between the federal government's handling of the two disasters.